



SCHOOL BUS, INC.

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION "POINT OF CONTACT" **SEPTEMBER 2008 NEWSLETTER**

Driver Training Deadline

Remember the driver-training deadline is October 15. All training should be done by this date and all trained driver names need to be turned in to the state by this time.

School Bus Operators Turn the Tables in FTA Docket

We asked and you responded. In less than three weeks following NSTA's annual meeting and our outreach to the school transportation and private bus communities, the Federal Transit Administration was flooded with submissions supporting their proposed Policy Statement, which clarifies the restrictions on public transit agencies' transportation of students to and from school. The size of the docket has more than doubled (now numbering over 700 items), and proponents of the proposal now outnumber opponents. Even though the recent submissions were filed after the deadline, FTA has committed to considering all comments. As we have stressed, this may be the most important issue our industry has faced in many years. Comments from transit agencies across the country reveal just how widespread violations of the school bus regulations are; and those agencies are not likely to give up the revenue that comes from school bus operations without a fight. Several members of Congress have already weighed in on the issue, and we fully expect this to be a topic in the highway reauthorization debates—unless it comes up sooner. One hopeful note is that this debate gives us an opportunity to bring up the disparity between public transit funding and school bus funding. The primary argument that commenters, including Members of Congress, make for allowing transits to transport students is that schools can no longer afford to operate or contract for yellow bus systems. The obvious answer to that is to use some of the public transportation funding to support school bus operations. If that were done, then students would have a safer ride and taxpayers would get greater value, since school bus operations are more cost effective than transit operations. We will continue to work this issue both at FTA and in Congress, and will likely call on members again as we need support in particular Congressional districts. In the meantime, thanks to all who took the time to send comments. Your efforts may well save your business.

Interest in School Fuel Cost Relief Rises in Congress

On July 24, Congressman Jerry McNerney (D-CA) introduced H.R. 6596, the Gas Price Relief for Schools Act. The bill provides emergency funding over a two-year period to help public school districts compensate for increased bus transportation costs caused by high fuel prices. Under the legislation, the Department of Transportation would be authorized to award need-based grants to state and local governments responsible for providing bus transportation to public school systems. The bill also contains language allowing private school bus fleets to access these grants as well. The introduction of H.R. 6596 comes at a time when interest in school fuel cost relief has elevated in Congress. Many members have either authored or voiced support for legislation that would help schools cope with the rising fuel costs. Senator Bob Casey (D-PA) recently introduced legislation that would assist rural school districts in paying for the increased price of school bus fuel. Like the McNerney bill, Casey's legislation would establish a need-based grant program. However, it would be administered through the Department of Education. Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and Representative Joe Baca (D-CA) have introduced the School Energy Crisis Relief Act, which would direct the Secretary of Energy to establish a grants program for eligible local educational agencies that have experienced the highest percentage increase in transportation and heating fuel costs in their vicinity. Schumer has also proposed a \$50,000 tax credit for the manufacture of hybrid diesel electric school buses. This credit could potentially provide fleet managers with a 40 to 100 percent increase in fuel economy. While final passage of any of these proposals remains doubtful, the rise in interest has brought attention to the problems being faced by the industry and creates a climate that is favorable to educating members of Congress about the energy and other benefits of using school buses. NSTA is working within the industry to develop consensus materials about the impact of high fuel prices and how school buses can be part of the solution by easing congestion and transporting school children safely and at a lower cost per pupil than using private.

It has come to our attention that not all school buses sold in the State of South Dakota have Fire Block seat material. The State requires all new school buses sold in the state to be equipped with fire block seat material. If you are not sure if your bus has fire block material, an easy way to tell is if the bottom seat cushion is covered. If it is it probably is seat block material. However, if you look under the seat and see plywood, the seat material is probably not fire block material. If this is the case you need to contact your dealer the bus was purchased from and have the material replaced to make sure the bus meets state specifications.

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